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ABSTRACT

This document consists of remarks introducing a collaborative panel on women's art and art education. By exploring the realms, relevance, and resources on women's art in art education, the panel hoped to address new and continuing issues, and to clarify continuing misunderstandings. The panelists shared the belief that only through consciousness raising can one be prompted to take necessary action for social change or vision building. Therefore, the session was designed to raise consciousness by sharing perspectives and approaches to increase the relevance of art as it is being redefined to include more kinds of people--women and others--in its production and appreciation. By linking these ideas to the curriculum, the art teacher's art forum, the panelists hoped to bridge the gap between issues in art and its disciplines, and issues in the classroom. This paper traces the history of the women's art movement as changing from a concern with finding great female artists to a recognition of the values, ideas, and traditions that have fostered a minimal presence, if not silence, of women's artistic voices, expressed or repressed through their visions. Recent books are discussed, and it is observed that art teachers create art history each time they select slides, choose textbooks, lecture to students, write papers, or jury art work. Teachers recreate art history in the minds of the children they teach and thus define what art is to children. Teachers are responsible for recognizing the power of art ideas and forms as well as the way those concepts are taught. (DK)

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Women's Art in Art Education: Realms, Relevance and Resources

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1991 NAEA CONVENTION: WHAT IS ART FOR?
March 23, 1991, Atlanta, Georgia

Curricular Issues Forum #5:
Women's Art in Art Education: Realms, Relevance and Resources

Introduction

Renee Sandell
Maryland Institute, College of Art

Good afternoon! Welcome to a collaborative panel on women's art and art education. I'm Renee Sandell, Associate Professor of Art Education at the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore and am joined my colleagues: Drs. Kristin Congdon, Elizabeth Garber, and Robyn Turner. Before we start, we'd like to express our gratitude to Dr. Karen Carroll for the special care she has devoted to planning the program. We are especially thankful to Karen for arranging for this supersession which focuses on one of many important, contemporary issues facing art educators. We are delighted to see many new and familiar faces here today to join in the dialogue.

With the preponderance of visual and written material on women artists, Why have this panel? Why are we still examining women's issues? By exploring the realms, relevance and resources on women's art in art education, this panel today addresses new and continuing issues and hopes to clarify (continuing) misunderstandings. We share the feminist belief that only through consciousness raising (which often stimulates anger, if not rage, from the gendered self?), can one be prompted to take necessary action for social change or "vision building". We have therefore designed our session to raise consciousness by sharing perspectives and approaches that we believe increase the

relevance of art as it is currently being redefined to include more people (women and others) in its production and appreciation. By linking these ideas to the curriculum, the art teacher's art form, we hope to bridge the gap between issues in art (and its disciplines) and issues in the classroom. Whether you are new to women's issues or an expert on the area, we hope you will keep an open mind toward some of the undiscovered and undervalued areas we will explore.

As some of you may realize, it has been 20 years since Linda Nochlin asked her now-famous question "Why have there been no great women artists?" This question, raised in an Art News article which was later reprinted in a book entitled Art and Sexual Politics, triggered the women's art movement that resulted in a search for women artists that were somehow missing from the pages of H.W. Janson's text, art magazines and museum walls. As the women's art movement evolved, the concern with "greatness" changed to a recognition of the values, ideas and traditions that have fostered a minimal presence if not silence of women's artistic voices, expressed (or repressed) through their visions.

During 70s and 80s, the women's art movement helped bring about an increase in the visibility of women's art as well as written ideas about it. Feminist approaches to art production, art history, art criticism and aesthetics provided for new paradigms useful for regarding not only women's art but art in general. What emerged was the growing awareness that the reverence of art created by the western white male was at the

cost of voices/visions of individuals from multiple, nondominant cultures. This realization is the subject of Lucy Lippard's newest book entitled Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America. In this volume, Lippard does not present a survey of art from the Native, African, Asian and Latino American communities, but rather deals with the ways cross-cultural activity is reflected in the visual arts. Attempting to reduce the separation of art from life, Lippard explores art processes out of which art forms are created. Her chapters are titled: naming, telling, landing, mixing, turning around and dreaming. Importantly, Lippard's book is not about "the Other," but a book about our common "anotherness" (p. 6). According to Lippard, "the real risk is to venture outside of the imposed art contexts, both as a viewer and as an artist, to live the connections with people like and unlike oneself. ..." (p. 14).

The continuing question regarding the empowerment of women and other artists in the art world is: whose artistic voices will be heard, whose will remain silent and how does this take place? This query not only concerns those who create art but also those who write and teach about it. To paraphrase art historian Josephine Withers' statement last month in her College Art Association session entitled "Who is the "We" Who Created Art History?": We create art history each time we select slides, choose textbooks, lecture to students, write papers, jury art work, and so forth... Similarly, we must remind ourselves that as art teachers, we recreate art history in the minds of the children we teach and thus define what art (in the studio,

history, criticism, and aesthetics) is to children. We are therefore responsible for recognizing the power of art ideas and forms as well as the way we teach about them.

If we want to enrich art history/concepts by meaningfully including the art of women and others, we must recognize the need to revise and revamp our own artistic frameworks in studio, art history, criticism, and aesthetics. Revisionism is difficult because our Janson-based art history infrastructures are so solid. It will require reexamining the ideas, values, and language used when we learn and teach, becoming involved in making new interpretations based on active inquiry rather than memorizing the "accepted" ones. When we add women artists to the white, western, male art history we've been taught, it is difficult to retain even the names; we must find new contextual ways of comprehending and appreciating this work. Thus, it is imperative that, from the start, children's art historical foundations are representative of many art ideas, cultures, etc.. Further, when children study art as "making special" behavior, as Ellen Dissanayake puts it, what they see and understand must be perceived as relevant to their everyday lives. Finally, we must be aware of and tend to the omissions--the SILENCES--the artistic voices of those who have yet to be heard and appreciated. In doing so, we may be able to begin to embrace the concept of multiculturalism in a meaningful way that affirms individual and cultural differences through art experience and critical thinking.

As art teachers we address the power of art education via

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our curriculum and instruction: how we teach ideas reflects our "artfulness" in selectivity, purpose and approach. When we focus on how and why certain art images are selected, we can become more aware of what may be called "the politics of (art) reproduction". We must look critically at what is readily (and increasingly abundantly) available and use the materials with sensitivity and care. We must also continually note what is missing, reminding children to seek artful expression in their own homes and communities. Why are certain ideas/voices heard and others not represented? We may also ask who selects the voices that will be heard and need to work harder to obtain nonmainstream images to share with our students in order to present a more representative definition of art.

If it truly takes about 15 years for a "new" idea to reach the curriculum, it is certainly past time that we, as art teachers, can decide not only if, but more importantly, how the art of women and other cultures will be included in the curriculum. Even though women's images are now readily available in the newest books and slide sets, as well as calendars, we must, however, delve deeper as we uncover and meaningfully relocate the contributions of women (and others) in art. We must ask ourselves and other students: What can we learn from the art work, written ideas and lives of Georgia O'Keeffe, Frida Kahlo, Faith Ringgold, and other artists whose work we have yet to see and appreciate?

All over the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. area, I do see that art classes are including women's art in their programs. I

suspect that many of you also see this, perhaps typified in a proliferation of Georgia O'Keeffe art projects. These frequently take the form of large flower paintings created in oil pastel, tempera or watercolor. As I look at the student work--often just the "best" examples are exhibited--I wonder what the students, at different developmental levels, really know about O'Keeffe, her ideas and her influence and of course, if and how they are learning to really see the world through her paintings. Are elementary students internalizing and applying to their lives her message that "Nobody sees a flower--really--it is so small--we haven't time... and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time." Are, and if so, how, are kids comparing O'Keeffe's flowers to flowers they've seen in the ground, displayed in table centerpieces or in other paintings? How does viewing her work influence their seeing the natural and/or supernatural world? I also wonder how secondary students relate to O'Keeffe's statement that "Where I was born and how I lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest" Can secondary students comprehend this important assertion by skillfully looking at O'Keeffe's work?

Probing how children learn about O'Keeffe's work in the art room has become a kind of litmus test for me (and I hope for you too, if I've raised you're consciousness). When I see those student art projects, I search for the power of thought, purpose, authenticity and knowledge in the students' artistic responses. I hope that the teacher's instructive purpose was not merely to deify O'Keeffe as a great woman artist but rather to help

students personally comprehend her vision and celebrate her artistic achievements. It's not the fact that O'Keeffe was a woman but that she was a woman who explored subjects that men didn't, such as sky and bones, and that she did it differently - in her own way. In addition to her major contributions to the history of modern art, O'Keeffe was on the artistic frontier for her gender in her time. (She was also, by the way, an art teacher.)

As children begin to appreciate O'Keeffe's unique ideas and work, they need to know that art historical inquiry is an active and ongoing process, rather than the collection of facts to be stored through memorization (and retrieved for I don't know what.) For example, my colleague Barbara Buhler Lynes, chair of Art History at Maryland Institute, College of Art and author of the book O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916 1929, continues to expand her thesis on O'Keeffe. In her new essay "O"Keeffe and Feminism: A Question of Position," which will be published next year in the second volume of Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany, edited by Mary Garrard and Norma Braude, Dr. Lynes' most recent discovery is that O'Keeffe herself was an ardent feminist. A member of the National Woman's Party from the 1920s to 1940s, O'Keeffe's belief that women and men were equals, stood in direct opposition to Alfred Stieglitz' essentialist interpretation of her work as feminine. Dr. Lynes' evidence has yet to be added to the major textbooks and needs to be asserted in the face of other viewpoints.

By becoming more aware of historiography and the formative

nature of knowledge construction of art that interpretations can change when scholars continue to search for evidence, teachers and students themselves can contribute to revisionism through studio, historical, critical and philosophical approaches in the classroom. As children begin to really see the world through the eyes of the artist, they can join with their teachers in the ongoing investigation of artists and their art (and their different ways of working). This applies not only to the dominant mainstream but also to hiddenstream art (which can be anonymous or collaborative) when we listen carefully for the silences and sensitively respond to them with a desire to know more than immediately meets the eye.

Finally, I'd like to assert that the ultimate goal of women's studies in art is to eradicate the need for it. Art teachers can play a major role in doing so, through which they can empower not only their students but also the art world and society at large. (And there's hope: while the Women's Art Movement has never focused on the art education of children, the current issue of the feminist art publication Heresies, focuses on "The Art of Education.") When we teach children about women's roles, work, and achievements in art's past and present in a representative, rather than complementary way, they will no longer need to specifically search for lost art images and heroines. Therefore, as children learn about art products and processes, it is important that they do so with accuracy and sensitivity, making their study a "living" art history that reflects the rich diversity, including their own, of visual ideas

that belong to all of humanity.

Our session today ties directly into the NAEA Conference theme "What is art for?" by exploring how can we, as art teachers address the question "What is women's art For?" with its multiple answers... We hope to identify continuing and current issues surrounding women's art, reexamining and revising the art history we have been given by H.W. Janson and others, and reclaiming women's place in art and the art room. Each of us on the panel hope to stimulate meaningful applications for discovering women artist's place in the K 12 art program:

Focusing on realms of women's art, Dr. Kristin Congdon will start today by examining critical approaches to women's mainstream and hiddenstream art. Dr. Elizabeth Garber, along with two collaborating graduate students, will explore the relevance of women's art history and criticism to the art program. Dr. Robyn Turner will provide guidelines for developing and using resources on women artists.

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